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ABSTRACT

Experiments in using outdoor education to affect juvenile development and deter crime abound. Most of these outdoor adventure programs use a setting of developed challenges and perceived risk situations in order to create a life-changing experience. However, these "adventures" remain contrived events and require significant interpretive skills to connect with reality. In contrast, the Apache Rescue Team provides a framework for success in situations of real-life significance. The team is an experiential education program that trains at-risk and probationary youth to respond to technical and medical search and rescue (SAR) situations. Team members, aged 12 and up, are trained in basic first aid, survival, and technical rope rescue techniques. As experience allows, members complete emergency medical technician, advanced technical rescue, and command training as well. The local school allows participants to make up academic work missed because of rescues, and the program provides after-school tutoring. The team makes itself available to all primary agencies organizing SAR responses that the team could respond to. High-profile activity in National Parks boosts participant self-esteem and increases awareness of occupational opportunities. This approach breaks new ground in long-term youth treatment and educational opportunities by challenging professional stereotypes. The team has met with success both in its goals for juvenile crime prevention and in providing first-class search and rescue services. (Author/SV)

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The Apache Rescue Team

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ABSTRACT

The Apache Rescue Team is a youth-oriented, experiential education program focusing on at-risk and probationary youth. The team provides a framework for success in situations of real-life significance. Through the program, the youth train for and respond to technical and medical search and rescue situations. This approach breaks new ground in long-term youth treatment and educational opportunities by challenging professional stereotypes. The Team has met with overwhelming success in both its goals for juvenile crime prevention and in providing first-class search and rescue services. The Apache Rescue Team is a unique solution in developing self-esteem and providing opportunities for at-risk youth.

"I understand that the activity I (my child) will be involved in is not solely an educational activity. I fully expect that I (my child) will be put into the position of saving lives in any variety of ways. I fully expect that my (my child's) actions may determine who lives and who dies. Finally, I also understand that some things may be out of my (my child's) control and that the result of these things may be death or permanent deformity to others.

"I understand that I (my child) will be participating in a program which is set up to provide medical and technical help to other people. As a result of this, I (my child) may be confronted with dangerous and unusual circumstances. The circumstances may involve major injuries and/or fatalities to other individuals. These injuries may include visual exposure to blood, dismemberment, angulated fractures, and other things which generally are considered unusual. These circumstances may include working in close to, or on, the injured individuals as my (my child's) training permits or directed by

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either a doctor or someone with further medical training than myself (my child). In light of these facts, I (my child) will be expected to work to the best of my (their) abilities and training.

"As part of a rescue team, I (my child) will be expected to respond to a rescue within five minutes, 24 hours a day. I also understand that I (my child) may be involved with rescues for long durations while involved with the program. In order to deal with these realities better, I will be an active participant in all of the trainings of this program."

Experiments in utilizing outdoor education to affect juvenile development and deter crime abound. Most of these outdoor adventure programs use a setting of developed challenges and perceived risk situations in order to create a life-changing experience. However, despite efforts to create significant challenges and impact comfort zones, these "adventures" remain contrived events and require significant interpretive skills to connect with real-life challenges. In maintaining safe boundaries and the accountability required in any youth treatment program, this seems to be the limit to adventure activities for at-risk youth.

Due to unexpected and unscheduled glitches, from natural phenomena to personal or logistical events, real adventures happen. Assuming that preexisting safeguards were adequate, these adventures are characterized by some elements being unknown and outcomes having tangible significance rather than theoretical. These trips go down in the history of programs as being epics and learning tools for the future. However, these epics seem to have a more profound impact on all involved than when the trip is a perfect trip.

Significant self-rescues as well as backwoods contact with other users in need of assistance create these situations of genuine need. For the Apache

Rescue Team, these situations of need comprise the majority of program goals and operations.

The Apache Rescue Team operates primarily as a means of preventing juvenile crime. This is directly facilitated by providing a structure of training, trips, tutoring, and unscheduled search and rescue call-outs. The adventure aspect of the team is facilitated through the team's ability to respond to the diverse needs of law enforcement, national parks, and resource managers. The rescue team's active pursuit of recognition by the numerous agencies requiring search and rescue services allows diverse and challenging settings for operations. Operations locally and nationally make participation possible for youth with a variety of needs and levels of commitment.

The year-round operation of the rescue team facilitates a variety of roles as a youth service. The team training and operations are available to all youth twelve years old and up. The team members go through a number of trainings throughout the school year — based on individual experience and maturity level. All team members are trained in basic first aid, survival, and technical rope rescue techniques. As well, members go through Emergency Medical Technician, advanced technical rescue, and command training as experience allows. These activities are carried out in an extracurricular fashion contingent on school requirements, in some cases earning college credit. The team office is also available to the program youth as a resource. Self-directed training and continual skills refreshment are dependent on materials and settings available in the office, and are essential for team development and cohesion. Tutoring in school subjects also takes place as part of the ongoing operations. Staff are continually called on as resources for counseling and aiding in further educational opportunities.

Search and rescue call-outs can obviously take place at any time throughout the year. The team makes itself available to all the primary agencies organizing SAR responses that the team could respond to. Responses requiring a large number of searches or longer operations that require replacement personnel are typical for the team. The local school allows youth to miss classes for rescues as long as they meet academic requirements. This cooperation with the school reduces conflicts that most volunteer rescuers experience and allows the Apache Rescue Team to be of significant aid during any operation. In response, the team has mandatory study sessions after school equal to the number of days missed.

During the school year, a number of scheduled events also stand out for their significance. Major trainings take place during school holidays and low-conflict periods. National experts in search and rescue are brought in to do specialized training for the team. Members of the team are also involved in annual training at the Grand Canyon National Park alongside other professionals in search and rescue. Team members also take recreational trips during school breaks, allowing a greater connection with each other as well as developing periphery skills. The overall effect is to provide a variety of engaging opportunities during the school year and to keep the preparedness level of the team up.

Summer activities experience fewer conflicts, allowing a more engaging schedule of activities. The year-round availability for searches and rescues is supplemented in the summer with scheduled activities in national parks. Both Grand Canyon and Yosemite National Parks augmented their search and rescue teams with the Apache Team. New policies in national parks, aimed at increasing user safety, place highly trained personnel in a preventative position. This allows the team youth to be in position to regularly

use skills and experience a greater frequency of emergency response. High-profile activity in the National Parks serves to boost the youth's self-esteem and affect awareness of occupational opportunities. National recreational events like the Phoenix Bouldering Contest or the Eco-Challenge also create similar high-profile situations with professional contact with international celebrities.

The Apache Rescue Team uses a holistic approach in order to impact the lives of at-risk youth. The nature of search and rescue allows youth to contribute on a high level and be recognized for their efforts. The effort the youth put into any SAR operation constitutes a real adventure with life and death as well as other tangible consequences resulting from decisions. Opportunities for control and leadership are well defined within operations and available to any participant, contingent on the effort they are able to put forth. Opportunities for recreational skills and participation are also a major part of team training as familiarity with activities aids rescue, as well as parallel high-risk recreation and rescue. Finally, career and vocational training are a natural result of team training along with assistance in school work. The combined effect of the team's effort is a structure supportive to constructive youth development and inclusive of adventure interests.